

ADDRESS
OF
GENERAL A. B. R. SPRAGUE,
GRAND COMMANDER,
DEPARTMENT OF MASS.
G. A. R.
DELIVERED AT THE
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE DEPARTMENT
IN WORCESTER, JANUARY 20, 1869.

BOSTON:
B. F. BENNETT & CO., STATIONERS,
No. 116 STATE STREET.
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ADDRESS.

COMRADES : —

We have assembled in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of our Order, and upon the day designated in our By-Laws, to discharge important duties entrusted to us as the representatives of thousands of our comrades who constitute the Department of Massachusetts, Grand Army of the Republic.

To God, the Great Commander of all, let us with grateful hearts to-day, upon the threshold of the opening year, lay upon the altar our feeble tribute of praise for innumerable blessings vouchsafed to us as individuals ; as citizens still living under a Republican form of Government, and as members of our noble Order, which is gathering into the fold of brotherhood by thousands, the veterans who kept step to the music of the Union, and rallied around the dear old flag in the dark days of the Rebellion.

I do not propose to encroach upon the brief hours allotted to this Convention, by the presentation of an elaborate address, but shall, briefly, in a general way, review the progress of the Order during the year just closed, and refer you to the Reports of the Assistant Adjutant-General and Assistant Quarter-Master General, for details.

The first Post in this State was chartered on the 4th day of October, 1866. A sufficient number of Posts having been formed, the Department of Massachusetts was permanently organized on the 7th day of May, 1867, and at the commencement of the year 1868, forty Posts had been duly chartered, and the names of about nineteen hundred members inscribed upon our rolls.

At the meeting of the National Encampment, held in the City of Philadelphia, on the 15th, 16th, and 17th days of January last, important changes were made in the revision of the Rules and Regulations, as well as in our Ritual.

The District System was abolished, bringing Posts and Post Officers into direct communication with Department Head-Quarters. This change secured uniformity in system, and punctuality in despatch of business, while it added largely to the duties imposed upon the Assistant Adjutant-General, and without question, has materially retarded the establishment of Posts in the sparsely settled portions of our Commonwealth.

To facilitate the transaction of business, Head-Quarters having been established at Boston, by the courtesy of Comrade E. J. Jones, rooms were secured in Bromfield Street, free of cost; and to relieve the Assistant Adjutant-General of a portion of the detail of the office, I appointed Comrade C. W. Thompson, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General.

There are those in every community who look with suspicion upon secret organizations, and who shrink instinctively from connecting themselves with, or countenancing an Institution whose doors and doings are sealed to all save the initiated or those who are eligible to membership. But the frank and open avowal of the objects to be accomplished by this Organization, announced to the world, and incorporated in the revised Rules and Regulations of our Order, as adopted at the last meeting of the National Encampment, has placed beyond a doubt, if any before existed, that the results we hope to accomplish in this Union, which we have formed, justify the means and entitle our Order to the confidence of the patriotic and the charitable. We aim,

1st. To preserve and strengthen those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, who united to suppress the late Rebellion.

2d. To make these feelings efficient in works of kindness, and material aid to those who fought with us by land

or by sea, for the preservation of the Union, and who now need our assistance for themselves or their families, by making provision where it is not already made.

3d. For the protection and assistance of such as have been disabled, either by wounds, sickness, old age, or misfortune.

For the maintenance of the widows of such as have fallen, and the support, care and education of their children.

4th. To establish and secure the rights of these defenders of their country, by all moral, social, and political means in our control.

To inculcate upon the whole country a proper appreciation of their services, and a recognition of their just claims.

But this Association does not design to make nominations for office, or use its influence as a secret organization for political purposes.

5th. To maintain true allegiance to the United States of America, based upon a permanent respect for, and fidelity to, the National Constitution and Laws, to be manifested by the discountenancing of whatever may tend to weaken loyalty, incite to insurrection, treason, or rebellion, or in any manner impair the efficiency and permanency of our free institutions, together with a defence of universal liberty, equal rights, and justice to all men.

These are our doctrines and our articles of faith.

Governed by these principles, the growth of our Order has been unparalleled in history. Entering upon the third year of its existence, we find thirty-eight Departments fully organized, with nearly three thousand Posts, and a membership exceeding four hundred thousand.

During the past year, the record of our Department will, we believe, compare favorably with any other. From forty Posts, and less than two thousand members, we have increased to seventy-seven Posts, and more than six thousand members.

Borne upon our rolls, to-day, are the illustrious names of officers of high rank, who served with distinguished ability, and added to the fame and glory of our ancient Commonwealth; and thousands of the rank-and-file who, with muskets and bayonets formed that living parapet of fire which defied the shot and shell, and drove back the traitor hordes, silencing their batteries and their yells, forever immortalizing the citizen soldier, and by their intrepid valor saving all that is dear to the patriot. All united alike, pledged to maintain our country's honor, and bestow with a brother's hand our noble charities.

From the "gnawings of hunger, and the pinchings of want," from a pauper's fare and a pauper's grave, how many have been rescued, will only be known when the recording angel renders his final account; but those of you who have stood by the bedside of a sick and dying com-

rade, and ministered to his comfort, and dropped a tear as with tender hands you have committed "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust;" you, who as individuals or the almoners of the Post, have fed the hungry and clothed the naked, and seen the eye of an unfortunate comrade, his widow or orphan moisten with gratitude that sympathy and relief were timely bestowed, have no lingering doubt of the success of our Organization, or that Charity is its Chief Corner Stone.

It was predicted before the close of the war, that with returning peace a large proportion of our army, demoralized by the scenes and surroundings ever attendant upon "active service," would become unfitted for the peaceful pursuits of life. But such false prophets forgot, that as a rule, the men who buckled on the armor were actuated by love of country and a determination that the republican form of government established and secured by the sufferings and indomitable perseverance of our fathers, should not perish without a struggle. By the discipline of the army, and the trials they endured, they learned the value of citizenship, they earned the highest place in the hearts of their countrymen, and were entitled to a "proper appreciation of their services" from a country they had sacrificed so much to save.

From military to civil life, the step was easy. One to his farm, another to his merchandise, and another to his profes-

sion. Having laid aside the blue, and adopted the garb of the civilian, to each other, except to personal acquaintances, comrades were unknown, and the old adage that "Republics are ungrateful," had become an axiom to many, who, in search of employment, learned that with some employers it was a positive disqualification if the applicant had served in the armies of the Union.

We have learned from experience, that in "union there is strength," as in militaty so also in civil life, and by combined action have already done something to command the respect of individuals and communities, and win the confidence and esteem of the good and the charitable.

We may congratulate ourselves, in this Department at least, that during a year of unusual political excitement, we have closed up our ranks, thrown our standard to the breeze, inscribed with the ever-living principles of our Order, and have not circumscribed its influence by lending its organized strength for partizan purposes.

"To maintain true allegiance to the United States of America," requires no special effort on the part of those who have voluntarily borne arms to sustain its honor and its flag.

To "discountenance whatever may tend to weaken loyalty, incite to insurrection, treason, or rebellion," is the plainest duty of every American citizen.

Treason is no less a crime because traitors go unpunished.

We have been taught that "to err is human, to forgive, divine." But that forgiveness which precedes repentance is not of divine origin.

I have unswerving confidence in the patriotism of the men and women of our country, whose prayers went up like incense to the throne of God, that He would give us victory in the day of battle, who kept not back their sons and brothers, but sent them out to strike for home and country, and laid upon its altar their dearest earthly hopes to stem the tide, to fill the trenches that over their bodies torn and bleeding, some might storm the citadel of treason, and plant the insignia of our liberty, (so often torn to shreds in the fearful struggle,) on the topmost walls.

But we may well blush when we instruct our children in the history of our struggle for the nation's life, and bid them learn the lesson of the war, to admit that no punishment was meted out to those who betrayed their country. Aye, more, that before five summers had passed, ere—overwhelmed in defeat, in the last ditch the traitors surrendered—the country heard without a shock, to unrepentant rebels, without reservation, full pardon and amnesty proclaimed for the offence of treason against the United States, during the late civil war, with restoration of all rights, privileges, and immunities under the constitution and the laws which have been made in pursuance thereof.

In the name of outraged humanity; by the untold sufferings endured by our comrades, faithful even unto death, in the prison-pens at Andersonville, at Salisbury, at Belle Lile, and other places of torment; in the name of more than three hundred thousand dead, the flower of the Republic, victims of a rebellion which sought to overthrow the best government ever established on earth, since the morning stars sang together; we enter our solemn protest against the admission to equal rights and privileges of traitors, who welcomed, with bloody hands, our comrades "to hospitable graves," who inhumanly, by starvation and torture, drove out from its clayey tenement the patriot soul they could not conquer, and who have forfeited their lives by every principle of equity and justice. Shall we extend the olive branch to such as these, while we deny the right of citizenship to those who were "faithful among the faithless found?"

The Commander-in-Chief, remembering the noble sacrifices of the gallant dead, wisely set apart the 30th day of May, 1868, "for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of those who died in the defence of their country during the late rebellion."

In this Department the day was observed with becoming solemnity. All that was mortal of thousands who fell on distant fields, sons of Massachusetts, have found a resting place among kindred and friends. To the humblest grave

and the costliest monument alike, the choicest flowers and freshest garlands were borne by comrades' hand, and with appropriate ceremonies tenderly strewn in memory of the gallant ones who thought that

“To die in Freedom's cause, was something gained,
And nothing lost, to fall.”

The day was faithfully inaugurated. He who joined the services, drank new inspiration as bending over the narrow house appointed for all the living, each consecrated all the powers of body and mind to the maintenance of those principles for which they suffered and died.

In answer to a call from the proper authorities, this Department sent a quantity of flags to decorate the graves of our comrades buried in the vicinity of Richmond.

In many localities, where no Posts exist, appropriate services were held, and fair hands twined the laurel and the rose, and laid them above the sleeper, in memory of the heroic dead, whose names and deeds are immortal.

Let us, then, year by year, gather around the sacred places, and perform this beautiful and touching ceremony, “while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades.” It is less than four years since along our lines the roar of cannon, and the rattle of musketry died away.

The little wooden slab sometimes erected over a gallant comrade, buried on the field where he fell, would hardly be recognized to-day by the hand of affection which reared it. The plow in the furrow has forever obliterated the last trace of many a soldier's resting place, save to His All-seeing Eye, "without whose notice not a sparrow falls."

"When Spring with busy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.
By fairy bands their knell is rung,
By forms unseen their dirges sung;
There Honor comes, a pilgrim, gray,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay.
And Freedom shall awhile repair
To dwell a weeping hermit there."

Time's busy fingers are gently crumbling Bastion and Redan. "Scarp and Counter-Scarp meet in the ditch." A little ridge only marks the field work where contending armies fought, where the soil drank in the life-blood of our patriot comrades, and over which hovered the angel of liberty, to give the countersign to the faithful to pass the golden gate to immortality.

They died before victory was proclaimed, and our land was consecrated by its baptism in their blood, to universal liberty.

Day by day the darkness of the grave closes over comrades who rode out the storm, when the angel of death held high carnival; and soon "mustered out," shall be written against the name of the last survivor of the war of the Rebellion, and the Grand Army of the Republic shall be known only in history.

Welcome, then, to our swelling ranks, every veteran who is eligible to membership, for ours is the work of a generation, and if well done, shall, through agencies incomprehensible to us, known only to Him who knows the end from the beginning, be felt a *living power*, when the names of those who participated in this great struggle for the advancement of *Right* shall be forgotten, and the monuments reared to their memory shall have crumbled into dust.

COMRADES,

To-day it is your duty to designate such officers as are elective, into whose hands shall be committed the direction of the interests of our Order in this Department for the ensuing year. I fully appreciate the unsolicited honor which was conferred when the important trust, which I surrender into your hands to-day, was committed to my keeping for the term now closing, and I embrace this occasion, coupled with the announcement that I am not a candidate for re-election, to make grateful acknowledgments

for the prompt assistance rendered by the Council of Administration, and for the uniform courtesy extended to me at all times by my associates.

I bear special testimony to the marked ability, fidelity, and energy with which Assistant Adjutant-General Sherwin has discharged the important duties of his office. With a clear head, an honest heart, and a just perception of the objects we hope to accomplish, he has labored faithfully and assiduously, and is entitled to receive your warmest commendation, and my personal gratitude.

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